Florentine
Sonnets

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FREDERIC THOMAS BLANCHARD

Francis T. Blanchard,
September, 1909.

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SOUTH SIDE OF THE RIVER ARNO

Florentine Sonnets

written and illustrated

by William Leighton

Florence
MCMVI.

Photogravure Fiorelli

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LOGGIA DEI LANZI

Florentine Memories

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Through these old streets I wander dreamily;
Around me Florence sweeps her busy tide
Of life; quaint palaces on every side.
Here, where I pass, perchance in former day
Petrarch hath walked, composing poetry
To oft-sung charms of Laura. Here hath hied
Dante, of Florence now the greatest pride,
But whom, in life, she fiercely drove away,
To write in gloom his epic. Here, beneath
This loggia, Boccaccio hath told
His laughing tales, to comrades, merrily —
What wondrous memories these scenes bequeath!
What artists, sculptors, painters, here of old
Fashioned this lovely gem of Italy!

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Photogravure Fratelli

CLOISTERS OF SAN MARCO
THE MONASTERY OF SAVONAROLA

Florentine History

Before me rises grim a fortress wall
Where Guelph and Ghibelline waged cruel war;
These streets were full of war-cries, and they saw
So many fearful tragedies befall
That no historic pen can write them all.
Here, in defiance of the church's law,
Died Savonarola — Was he hero or
Fanatic? — Both, perchance. His bravest call
Was Freedom's: let this glorify his name;
Nor superstition dim too much his fame.
In the Piazza della Signoria
There is a tablet with his name and face,
Where strangers stop, as at a sacred place,
To read the world-known name of Savonarola.

GIOTTO'S CAMPANILE

Florentine Art

See Giotto's fairy campanile spring,
Fair as a lovely flower, to kiss the skies:
No nobler structure ever may arise
To glorify the builders. Art was king
In Florence, and the wondrous fashioning
Of his fair city still delights our eyes —
His Florence built when beauty was the prize
Most worthy life's large thought and laboring;
When labor was made pleasure by the skill
With which its daily handicraft was done.
Oh, those old days, a golden lesson, bring
To our declining art: that he, who will,
May find the way, the Florentine once won,
To make his art a fair and glorious thing!

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ENTRANCE TO THE VIA BARDI

Florentine Romance

Mingling with actors in old history
Are other Florentines whose shapes I view,
Walking these streets, each form as clear and true
As other citizens. Reality
Denies not place to artist imagery:
What noble Florentine may match with you,
Unhappy Romola? Blind Bardi, too,
Claims here his heritage, his right to be
Part of this Florence — Tito, with sleek smile
Upon his handsome face, and Baldassarre
Hiding his dagger — Yes: these shapes are with me,
Haunting thy streets, O Florence! all the while;
For they are real and Florentine as truly
As Prince Lorenzo, or world-famous Dante.

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PONTE VECCHIO

On the Ponte Vecchio

I stand upon the Ponte Vecchio, where
Cellini's bust looks on the busy mart
In which are vended toys of modern art:
Methinks I see that rugged visage glare,
And in its eyes a proud, disdainful stare
On the cheap glitter round him — But no part
Hath this in memories that stir my heart:
From this stone parapet they cast in air
Thy ashes, Savonarola, to be blent
With Arno's flood. Along this ancient way
Lorenzo the Magnificent oft went
With princely train of nobles. On the day
When Fate bade Tito face his Nemesis
Here plunged he down in Arno's dark abyss.

Photogravure Furetti

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CLOISTERS OF SANTA CROCE
THE WESTMINSTER ABBEY OF FLORENCE

The Yesterdays of Florence

Dim shadows often memories may be;
But thy old memories are brightest things,
O Florence! — All have voices, whisperings,
Of those who won thee immortality
And fame throughout the world. And these are thee.
Thy poets, painters, sculptors, are the kings
Of thy renown. It is their fame that brings
Pilgrims to thee, o'er every land and sea,
An endless host. Here in thy palaces,
Museums, churches, loggias, in thy store
Of art, and picturesqueness of thy beauty,
Are thy great yesterdays: thy glory is
In those bright, medieval days of yore
That wrought the artist crown for thy fair city.

Photogravure Piretti

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TOMB OF GIULIANO DE' MEDICI
WITH STATUES OF DAY AND NIGHT BY MICHELANGELO

The Statue of Day

By Michelangiolo

The early day of man before the light
Of spirit filled his rude and brutal clay
With consciousness of powers, in later day
To crown his race — Untamed, his savage sight
Looks out upon the world. A shape of might,
A face of cruel will without one ray
Of inner clearness to illume his way,
An animal man. Although the world be bright
In sunlight, and gigantic mightiness
Fills his brute form, his unawakened soul
Sees naught of beauty in the sunshine's glow;
His heart knows not the calm delights that bless;
Fierce appetites, his fitful thoughts, control:
So waits the soul, a later life will know.

Photogravure Fiorelli

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TOMB OF LORENZO DE' MEDICI
WITH STATUES OF TWILIGHT AND DAWN BY MICHELANGELO

The Statue of Twilight

By Michelangiolo

Twilight of soul! From out his chrysalis
The man awakes to life's great mystery,
In shape of earth, a mind's divinity.
But what a high divinity is his,
As yet he knows not. Heaven's inspiring kiss
Hath waked him from brute sleep; but dreamily
Struggle his thoughts; nor clearly can he see;
For, in perplexing maze, he fears to miss
The golden ray that waked him from his sleep,
And dazzles still his unaccustomed eyes.
Soon will he upward look with bolder sight,
And, from inaction, his stroug limbs will leap
To meet whatever fortune may arise,
Rejoicing, godlike, in the heavenborn light.

Photogravure Parisii

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STATUE OF MICHELANGELO

The Statue of Night

By Michelangiolo

She sleeps; but not in healthy restfulness
Of mind or body. Slumber is not rest;
For weary troubles weigh upon her breast.
Alas, what deep anxieties oppress
This sleeping Florence with their sad distress!
In vain her foot is on the poppies pressed;
In vain her owl keeps vigil: care, confessed,
Constrains her face and form; sleep doth not bless
Although the mask, that she must wear by day,
Is laid aside. In vivid dreams she sees
Distracting factions rage around her sleep,
Whose clamorous contentions drive away
Sweet Peace, with their unceasing jealousies;
While darker shapes, upon her visions, creep.

Photogravure Fiorelli

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INTERIOR OF SANTA CROCE
WITH TOMBS OF MICHELANGELO AND DANTE

Copyright

The Statue of Dawn

By Michelangiolo

Sad Florence wakes; but still her dreams of woe
Linger to haunt her, while the new day brings
Its fateful store of dismal happenings.
She fears the falling of a fatal blow:
That her loved artists, patriots, must go
To cruel death. Her city fiercely rings
With many wild and angry threatenings.
Upon her brow we see the restless flow
Of painful thoughts — no peace in which to build
Her artist dreams in glorious creation
Of marble and of painting. War's dark trace
Blots out the beauty she would fashion. Filled
With suffering, anxiety, privation,
The master shows her waking, morning face.

Photogravure Brogi

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DAVID BY MICHELANGELO

The Narrow Stone

Around a block of marble sculptors stood,
With careful measures; and they cried, « Too thin!
A handsome bit of stone; but who could win
Heroic shape from this? » — « The stone is good! »
A calm voice said; but scorn and laughter rude
Greeted the master, who, amidst their din,
Saw, with creative eye, his task begin;
Beheld how he would shape the attitude
To suit the narrow limits. In that block
He saw the imprisoned might of David lie;
Saw how the champion's glorious form would show
When he had cut his hero from the rock,
Giving to deathless immortality
The shepherd Jew and Michelangiolo.

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PERSEUS SLAYING MEDUSA
BY B. CELLINI

The Statue, by Benvenuto Cellini, of Perseus slaying Medusa

Marvel of might and grace! Exultant power
Is in the hero's poise; Medusa's head
Chills not his fire. Long though the age is dead,
Of which Greek myths were born, they are our dower
From a poetic Past, and each a flower
Of bright, undying bloom. The thought that led
Your art, Cellini, to a legend red
With Gorgon blood, preserves unto this hour,
With matchless art, the deathless Greek romance.
How this heroic demigod was cast,
We have your story: how you hoped and feared
In its vicissitudes of doubtful chance,
And your glad exultation when at last
Grand, from its mold, your masterpiece appeared.

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SCOPPIO DEL CARRO AT EASTER

Lo Scoppio del Carro

Pazzi of Florence, knight of noble line,
Brought from Jerusalem a holy stone
Broke from the sepulchre, and it was shown
To the devout how this might be a sign
Of the kind providence of the divine
Ruler of all. And so it soon was known
That when its sacred fire had safely flown
Harvests would ripen, grain and fruit and wine.

So, at the Easter-time, a snow-white dove
Bears from the altar consecrated light
Into a car that kindles into flame,
Thus bringing down good fortune from above.
Drawn through the city by four oxen white,
The people hail this car with glad acclaim.

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DANTE'S HOUSE IN PIAZZA S. MARTINO

The Tragedy of Dante's Life

To Dante's thoughtful soul life's tragedy
Seemed overfull of wrong and harsh disdain.
What wonder that his exile gave a strain
Of sadness to his verse! his Comedy
Divine so full of human misery!
His fate, an exile, ever to remain,
Not even love, its dearest hopes, could gain
Howe'er he sang its sweet supremacy.

Like Hamlet's, all his world was out of joint —
Unhappy fate! he could not set it right.
Though great imaginations, to him, came,
Calamity was sure to disappoint;
Though Poesy illumed him with her light,
She lit a joyless life to later fame.

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ROSELLINO'S MADONNA IN SANTA CROCE

Rossellino's Madonna
in Santa Croce

Hark to the joyous bells of Santa Croce
While the full-crowded streets ring with the cry,
« Lorenzo! » Some there be who noisily
Are shouting, « Rossellino! » Who is he?
A sculptor whose Madonna now will be
A precious gift to Santa Croce. Why?
Because Lorenzo thus would please the city:
So Nori serves his friends, the Medici.

And Rossellino's fair Madonna seems,
With childlike face, as calmly innocent
As the sweet babe she holds, while earnestly
Surrounding cherub faces, forward bent,
Are lighted by a worshipping that beams
Upon the Christ-child's pure divinity.

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